

# Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF

6

December 1994 - January 1995

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Taizé  
European Meeting  
of Young Adults  
28 December 1994  
- 1 January 1995  
PARIS

THE EUROPEAN MEETING  
OF YOUNG ADULTS IN PARIS

## The final weeks of preparation

Making the many visits that a preparation entails means being received by groups and communities that can be very different from one another. More than two hundred and fifty churches or groups of churches have already started. Six years ago an earlier European meeting already took place in Paris. The challenge this time, however, is greater for the number of participants coming from far away has grown.

The small preparation groups bring together young people and adults and meet regularly. They inform others, telling them about the meeting, and begin preparing accommodation for those who will be staying with them.

Prayer is at the center of preparations: starting a regular prayer leads people out, as it were, on an inner pilgrimage and quietly makes everyone more able to open themselves and welcome other people whom they do not yet know. Brothers of the community have been in Paris since September,

and every day at noon they gather in a city-center church for prayer together with young people.

formed us right away that they would be ready to provide materials for breakfast during the meeting. We have divided out the different streets among ourselves in order to go house-to-

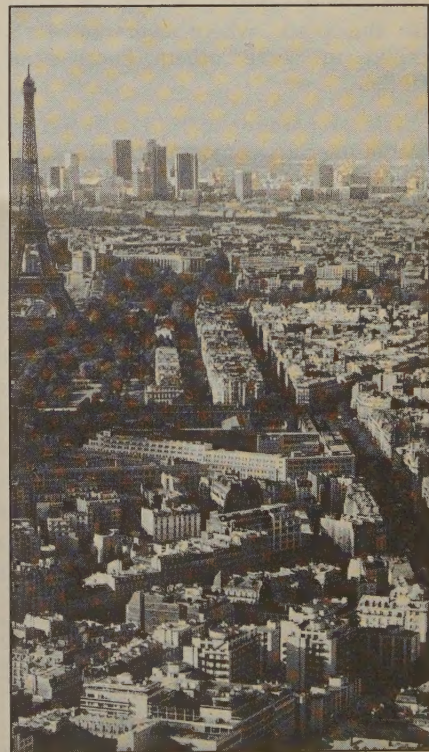
### IDEAS ABOUND

Ideas abound when young people of the Paris region try to find ways to approach others and ask for their help in offering accommodation, when they invite them to share the joy of being on a journey together, coming as they do from such different horizons:

"Our parish is situated some fifteen kilometers north of Paris and has made an effort to be present to those who do not attend church. On Sundays some of us always remain at the market square. People can come to borrow a book, ask a question, or receive a newsletter which contains reflection topics for the week. On several Sundays, we shall offer information about the European meeting."

"In our town south of Paris, the European meeting could offer us the opportunity to discover others and take a further step towards becoming a real parish community. We have requested shopowners to post information about it in their stores. Some of them in-

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house, always by twos, a young person together with an older person."

## THE CHANCE TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER BETTER

**T**he number of visits being made is growing, visits to different churches, schools, communities, and welcome centers that care for those in difficulty or who are excluded from society. In this way, numerous signs of hope come to light. People who commit themselves selflessly for others transmit hope. So often they are unaware of how important what they do actually is. Sometimes churches propose meetings where various groups can come and get to know the others better. It is no little matter when, within a local community, fifty or a hundred persons are trying to serve others. One person writes:

"It seems essential to me that everyone discover to what extent he or she is called to carry the Church through prayer and action. Many young people hesitate about taking up any kind of responsibility. On the one hand because they do not feel they have the strength, competence or courage to do it, and on the other, because some of them at least have never been asked by someone else to do anything. At a time when so many people feel they are useless, it would be beautiful if the Church could be the place where everyone feels called to serve others because of Christ."

The preparation period also generates numerous contacts with the great diversity of Christians in Paris, with the various Churches, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, which will be working together for the meeting. There is similarly a great diversity of origins, for Paris is composed of many foreign communities who will also be welcoming participants during the meeting.

The visits with official authorities have revealed an unexpected concern for the European meeting, for example on the part of local mayors. Some of them have decided to help house participants in municipal halls and gymnasiums. The opportunity to welcome young people from numerous countries is perceived by many as a way to counter self-withdrawal. The army will make its own contribution by distributing tea and hot broth to participants at the Porte de Versailles, the central meeting place.

## MEETING ALONG THE WAY

**W**ithin the Paris region, the preparations for the meeting find an echo in the hearts of many Christians who have been involved in a recent synod gathering. The archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Lustiger, had said that such a gathering means "taking the road together, meeting along the way." The partitioning so typical of urban areas, with their suburbs and the pressures brought by crowds, often leads people to live solely for themselves or for their own group. Those who, in order to prepare the meeting, take the risk of going out towards others different from themselves, do not regret it:

"When we begin to meet one another in our locality, we see that different sensibilities do not bring division but are rather a source of wealth. To realize this means accepting that there exist several ways of doing things, and that no one is in a position to compare them. This experience has led me to understand that no one can think he or she is a better Christian than others! And what freedom there is when we are no longer tense about the way others see us!"

## IN EVERY REGION OF FRANCE

**P**reparations have begun in every part of France, with prayer and meetings being held in various regions. Many are aware that the Paris meeting can also mean taking responsibility to help. Many French young people will arrive in Paris early in order to support the local groups in the Ile-de-France, to help with group animation, in welcoming participants or other services at the Porte de Versailles.

## ALL ACROSS EUROPE

**A**ll across Europe, preparations for the meeting allow people to experience in their own countries what will happen during the meeting in Paris itself. In despite of the large number of autumn visitors in Taizé, young people working there have been leaving for different countries in order to meet up with those who will be going to Paris. Whether it be in Roumania, Germany,

in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine, in France or in Belgium, such visits help to ensure a better preparation and to call attention to the spirit behind the meeting.

For those young people who dare go and visit other parishes and groups in their city or town, the preparation truly means setting out on the road. From Freiburg, in Germany:

"When we first thought about visiting different communities, we spoke about it with local Church leaders. They urged us to go ahead. We proposed meetings with religion teachers and their students. Most of the students do not go to church and the questions they have often lead to interesting discussions, even if it is not always easy to answer. When we go, we always suggest taking a moment of silence, together with some Taizé chants and each time students are very touched. Going around to visit all the churches has brought us many surprises and we learn of the many different experiences people have. In one very poor area we visited, the church had just been burnt down and yet we found such courage in the people living there who retain their joy and strength in the midst of difficulty.

For our preparation meeting, we chose the theme, "setting out like Abraham." When the day came, we went to visit people's homes, going in one case to the apartment of an elderly woman who had often gone to Taizé in the past but who was now unable to move about. Her courage and faith gave us new energy. However, of all the places we went to, the most impressive was the prison. Before going, we had prepared a prayer service, choosing songs which we thought would be well-suited. But once we were actually there, the words took on even more meaning: "Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies out..." and "Jesus, your light is shining within us; let not my doubts and my darkness speak to me..." Those we met there are so often discouraged and feel forgotten. They have no one to trust in and cannot imagine there being a future."

In Vienna, Austria the preparations are sustained by a daily prayer gathering animated by young people, students and workers in the Votivkirche:

"The prayer does me a lot of good. It's a break in the middle of the day and it helps me not to forget that God is close. At first I had hesitated about going to Paris because it is such a big city. But the main point I see will be to go as a witness to our faith and to a welcoming spirit. This is important in cities where people are often led to close themselves off and be afraid of others."

In Saxony, in the eastern part of Germany, one important moment in the preparation was a "weekend of silence":

"In early October, we were received for our gathering by a new parish. People came from all over the region and took time to get to know one another and meet the other groups present. It was a bit like during the European meeting when one finds such joy and strength in being together. In our other smaller meetings, we would like to deepen this experience of communion and try to find ways of overcoming the misunderstandings between east and west, and between different groups. Many people's ardent wish is that the life of our churches be first of all turned toward others outside."

#### TO BE EXPECTED AND WELCOMED AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS

In several cities of Russia, groups are getting ready for the Paris meeting by gathering together in parishes. They will be accompanied by an Orthodox priest, Father Valentine, who is chaplain of the Orthodox youth ministry of the Patriarchate of Moscow and who has already brought groups to earlier meetings, in Munich for the European meeting last year and several times to Taizé. He said once again this past autumn how important an opportunity the meeting opens up for young Russians today:

"These meetings are very necessary for us who have grown up and lived in isolation, often turned inwards and distrustful of others and the outside world."

The economic situation here remains difficult. Everyone is preoccupied by work and bettering their family's living conditions. This creates inner tensions and can even trigger illness. After living many years with an inner emptiness, numerous young people find themselves in spiritual crisis.

To be expected by others, to be welcomed as brothers and sisters and to experience kindness are all essential for young Russians. When they return from Taizé I can see a change in them. They come to church, ask for baptism, and study the Bible. They believe that what they saw with their own eyes was real: the given life of the brothers of the community. They have met other young people who are not seeking only material things but who are rich in another way and who share their inner wealth with others. The way they see the Church, the faith and prayer has been deepened."

Christ Jesus, help us not to forget this: if it is faith, hope and love that lay a foundation for our life, it is a living love that counts above all else. And you give your love to every person. There is where inner peace begins; there will be found an entirely simple joy.

God of every human being, we would like to be witnesses of the Gospel in a world where we are so often disconcerted by the inexplicable suffering of the innocent. Wherever it is you place us, enable us to make Christ's compassion visible through our own life.

Prayers by Brother Roger

#### An appeal for the Paris meeting

The total cost of the European meeting in Paris will not be covered by the registration fees payed by the young people. A substantial deficit will remain. To give an example, the special ticket which will allow participants to use the Paris public transport system over the five days will cost 80 FF per person, whereas last year in Munich the same ticket cost only 40 FF. In addition, those coming from the eastern countries will be able to contribute to only a small portion of costs. The meeting is therefore in need of much support. Contributions (please mention that it is for the European meeting) can be sent to:

UK: "Operation Hope", Bank Account no. 44495090, Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, LONDON WC2R 0QS  
USA: "Operation Hope", c/o Taizé, 413 W. 48th St. New York, NY 10036  
IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEAELAND, SOUTH AFRICA, etc.:  
Contributions may be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope".

During the Christmas Eve celebration, the following text is read: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on the inhabitants of the land of gloom light has blazed forth" (Isa 9,1). More than 700 years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah described the night of the world visited by God.

In the language of the Bible, "the land of gloom" is the place from which no one returns; the shadows are so thick that they paralyze everything (cf. Job 10,21). "The inhabitants of the land of gloom" are those who have been plunged by distress into such hopelessness that they see no way out. But it turns out that this

all their blood-soaked garments shall be burned as fuel for the fire" (9,3-4). The prophet realizes that violence cannot be the last word. Whoever hopes in God can never resign themselves to the misfortunes it causes. "The day of Midian" evokes the long-ago times when, during the night, God mysteriously intervened in favour of his people made up of the poor and lowly. Whereas every nation responds to threats of violence with violence, God's people learns to trust: "God is our refuge and strength; God will help at the dawn of day. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire" (Ps 46).

God does not desire war. But God

revenge. Peace among human beings implies that reparations are made for evil where possible, and an overflowing generosity is shown where it is not. That is what Zacchaeus the tax-collector does in order to make peace: "If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." But since he cannot pay back everyone he has wronged, he gives even more than is necessary: "I will give half of my possessions to the poor" (Luke 19,8).

The throne of the prince of peace is established "in judgement and integrity" (9,6). The word translated by "judgement" means decisions that are made according to God's commandments.

## *A child is born for us...*

### Isaiah 9,1-6

utter darkness leads to a daybreak; a great light rises on it. More than once in the Book of Isaiah we find the end of a night. "Watcher, what of the night?" And the watcher replies: "Morning is coming.." (21,11-12). When the new day dawns, the anguish of the night evaporates like a bad dream. "At evening time, terror! By morning all has disappeared" (17,14). God illuminates the earth so that it may be inhabited; he did not create it to be a chaos (cf. 45,18).

Celebrating the light that gives meaning and beauty to life, the prophetic word becomes a hymn: "You have increased their joy; they rejoice before you as at harvest-time, as people exult when dividing plunder" (9,2). In the ancient world, the harvest was an occasion for great rejoicing, for singing and dancing. The division of plunder, which could turn our thoughts to the bloody triumph of a conqueror, refers here, as the following verses show, to the end of a war and happiness at the return of peace.

"For the rod of their oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian. All the boots of the tramping warriors and

looks for faith. And he gives a sign to faith: "A child is born for us, a son given to us" (9,5). Astonished, we hear the names given to that child. They surprise us, for they are all names that express something of God. "Wonderful Counselor:" the child will open unexpected ways forward that nobody ever imagined; "through him the will of the Lord will be done" (53,10). "Mighty God:" to conquer death, he will have the power of God himself who "will destroy death for ever" (25,8). "Everlasting Father:" he will not leave anyone an orphan; he is the one who will never abandon anybody.

"Prince of Peace:" this last title is the most important, for it is immediately taken up and developed. The child who is born will reign in an "endless peace," in an "abundance of peace" as Psalm 72,7 puts it. In Hebrew, the root of the word "peace" (shalom) contains the idea of compensation or reparation; peace is the fullness of life restored. God's peace is a compensation for the suffering of the afflicted. He pays them back in joy for the days of misfortune they experienced (cf. Ps 90,15), so that their pain will cease and their heart not entertain thoughts of

"Integrity" is faithfulness to the communion of the covenant that God has established with his people.

"The zeal of the Lord," in other words his passionate love that is ready to do anything, "will do this" (9,6). And he even did more. On Christmas night, the prophet Isaiah himself would have been astonished to see the infant Jesus. In the baby in a poor manger, would he have recognized the son destined to occupy the throne of David? Mary's son is much more than a son of David. He is the light itself; he is our joy. And he is not only the prince of peace, but our peace itself. Where Christ is, even our sin is no longer an evil, for he has truly restored everything. "He has done everything well" (Mark 7,37).

Christ has revealed the foundation of peace, which is forgiveness. Peace is not a static situation where no one is indebted to another. The debt of mutual love remains forever (Rom 13,8). Ceaselessly, "seventy-seven times" (Matt 18,22), we are called to grant forgiveness and compassion, in the name of the Christmas Child and his peace without end.

# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## JANUARY

*These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.*

## JOHANNINE HOURS

### PHILIPPIANS 1,3-11

*Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

**1 SUN** We carry the treasure of God's glory in earthen vessels so that it may be quite clear that the radiance comes from God, not from us.

2 Co 4.7-11 Mt 5.23-24

**2 MON** God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col 1.13-15 Mt 2.16-21

**3 TUE** John writes: The light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.

Jn 1.1-5 Col 1.13-15

**4 WED** There is no other God but me, says the Lord. Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth.

Is 45.22-23 Jn 1.5-8

**5 THU** The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.

Jn 1.9-13 Ezk 20.41-42

**6 FRI EPIPHANY** The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.

Rv 21.22-26 Jn 8.12

**7 SAT** Sing of the Lord, for his works are great: make them known throughout the world. Cry out for joy, for God is among you.

Is 12.5-6 Jn 2.1-11

**8 SUN** When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

Mt 2.1-12 Is 60.1-6

**9 MON** Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

Is 40.1-11 Lk 3.15-22

**10 TUE** John said: I baptise with water; but standing among you — unknown to you — is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.

Jn 1.19-28 1 P 2.9-10

**11 WED** John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jn 1.29-34 Is 49.6

**12 THU** Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

Jn 1.35-42 Zc 2.15

**13 FRI** Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins.

Ep 2.4-5 Jn 1.43-51

**14 SAT** The Lord says: I shall make an everlasting covenant with my people, never to cease in my efforts for their good.

Jr 32.40-41 Jn 3.13-17

**15 SUN** Isaiah said: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day. And then all will see your justice, and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

Is 62.1-5 Jn 2.1-12

**16 MON** Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.

1 Jn 1.1-4 Jn 3.18-21

**17 TUE** God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

1 Jn 1.5-7 Jn 3.22-29

**18 WED** How great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called God's children. And that is what we are!

1 Jn 3.1-3 Jn 3.30-36a

**19 THU** Let us not love just with words and in speech, but with actions and in truth.

1 Jn 3.17-20 Jn 5.1-9

**20 FRI** John writes: You are from God, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

1 Jn 4.1-4 Jn 5.19-24

**21 SAT** This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

1 Jn 4.7-11 Jn 6.35

**22 SUN** The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

Lk 1.1-4; 4.14-21 Ne 8.1-10

**23 MON** At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

Mk 1.9-13 Gn 1.26-27

**24 TUE** Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

Mk 1.14-20 Gn 12.1-3

**25 WED** The Risen Christ said to Paul: I am sending you out so that people may turn from darkness to light and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins.

Ac 26.16-18 Mk 16.15-18

**26 THU** Jesus said: Those who are in authority over the nations lord it over them. But for you this must not be so. Instead, the greatest among you should act as if they were the youngest and the one who governs should be like one who serves.

Lk 22.24-30 Tt 1.1-4

**27 FRI** In the evening, after sunset, people brought to Jesus the sick and the possessed. He healed them and drove out many evil spirits.

Mk 1.29-34 Gn 32.25-30

**28 SAT** The Lord says: I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, yes, I know their suffering.

Ex 3.1-10 Lk 10.25-28

**29 SUN** God said to Jeremiah: Go to everyone I send you to. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you.

Jr 1.4-19 Mt 5.1-12

**30 MON** In the desert, the Lord went ahead of his people, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could walk by day and by night.

Ex 13.21-22 Mk 1.40-45

**31 TUE** Moses said to the people: Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see what God will do to save you today.

Ex 14.11-14 Mk 2.1-12

Most of the books of the New Testament are letters, written to reinforce the bonds of communion between believers. Usually, Saint Paul begins his letters with a prayer of thanksgiving for the community he is writing to. In this way he situates their relationship within a more encompassing communion, that which unites all the faithful to God through Jesus Christ. Paul is particularly attached to the Christians of Philippi; they have always kept him in mind and supported him when necessary by material aid. Now that he is in prison, thinking of them consoles him even more.

But the mutual affection they share is not just a simple human reality. "I long for you with the deep affection of Christ Jesus," writes the apostle (v.8). It is as if, in the attachment the Christians feel for one another, Christ is present in person, loving his followers. When Paul writes "for me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1,21) or when he speaks of "the Body of Christ which is the Church" (cf. Col 1,18), these are neither abstractions nor simple figures of speech but a true sharing of life.

Then, the thanksgiving turns into a prayer of intercession for the Philippians. Paul asks God to make their love grow so that they will be able to discern what God wants of them. Then they will bear "fruits of uprightness" that will enable others to discover God through the lives they live. Far from concerning only the emotions, God's love which is communicated to us through Christ is a source of knowledge; it gradually transforms our manner of looking so that we can find the way of God in the midst of the uncertainties of the world.

- What helps us to remember that faith is not just a philosophy but a life of communion lived out through specific choices and acts?
- How can I "live in thanksgiving" (Col 3,15b)? Does prayer enable me to situate human relationships and events in a more encompassing context?
- What elements help me to discern what God wants from me and from others?

# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## FEBRUARY

*These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.*

# JOHANNINE HOURS

## PSALM 24,1-6

*Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

**1 WED** Mk 2.13-17 Ex 15.2;17-18  
As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

**2 THU** Lk 2.22-40 Mt 3.1  
**PRESENTATION OF THE LORD** When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

**3 FRI** Mk 3.13-19 Ex 33.11-17  
Jesus called to himself those he wanted, and he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach.

**4 SAT** Lk 10.38-42 Ex 34.8-10  
Jesus said to Martha: You are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.

**5 SUN** Lk 5.1-11 Is 6.1-8  
Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

**6 MON** Mk 3.31-35 Lv 19.1-2  
Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

**7 TUE** Ps 16.11 Mk 4.1-9 Lv 19.18  
Lord, you teach me the way of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.

**8 WED** Mk 4.13-20 Lv 19.33-34  
Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

**9 THU** Lv 26.11-13 Mk 4.26-29  
God says to his people: I shall fix my home among you and never reject you. I shall be your God and you will be my people.

**10 FRI** Dt 4.29-31 Mk 4.30-34  
The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

**11 SAT** Lk 11.9-13 Dt 4.32-39  
Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

**12 SUN** Lk 6.17-23 Jr 17.5-8  
Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

**13 MON** Dt 6.4-9 Mk 4.35-41  
Moses said to the people: The Lord our God is the only God. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

**14 TUE** Dt 7.7-9 Mk 5.25-34  
Moses told the people: God set his heart on you and chose you, not because you are more numerous than other peoples, but it was out of love for you, and to keep his promise to your forefathers that the Lord delivered you from the land of slavery.

**15 WED** Mk 5.35-43 Dt 8.2-16  
Jesus said: Do not be afraid, only have faith.

**16 THU** Mk 6.6-13 Dt 15.7-8  
Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to turn to God and they drove out many evil spirits.

**17 FRI** Dt 30.11-14 Mk 6.30-44  
Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

**18 SAT** Dt 30.19-20 Lk 12.22-32  
Choose life: loving the Lord your God, listening to his voice, holding fast to him — for in this your life consists.

**19 SUN** Lk 6.27-38 1 S 26.2-23  
Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

**20 MON** Mk 6.45-52 Is 45.13  
When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, "Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

**21 TUE** Mk 7.31-37 Is 48.20  
Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak aside, away from the crowd. With a deep sigh, Jesus said "Ephphatha!", that is, "Be opened!". At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly.

**22 WED** Mk 8.27-33 Is 49.8-9  
Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

**23 THU** Mk 9.1-10 1 Tm 1.15  
Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

**24 FRI** Is 49.14-15 Mk 9.14-29  
Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

**25 SAT** Mk 8.34-35 Jr 31.7-8  
Jesus said: Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the Gospel will save it.

**26 SUN** Ps 4 Sl 27.4-7 Lk 6.39-45  
Many keep saying, "Who will give us happiness?" Lord, let the light of your face shine upon us.

**27 MON** 1 S 12.24 Mk 9.30-32  
Adore God alone; serve him faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things he has done.

**28 TUE** Mk 9.33-37 Ezk 34.25  
Jesus said: Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

This song, used thousands of years ago for an entrance liturgy into the Temple of Jerusalem, offers a context to understand the significance of one of the Beatitudes of Jesus: "Happy the pure in heart: they will see God!" (Matt 5,8).

The song begins by a confession of faith in God as creator and master of the universe. Walking toward the holy place, the faithful thus express the fact that they are undertaking a pilgrimage to the source, an act that is not partial but that commits the whole of their existence. On the threshold of the Temple built on Mount Zion (the "mountain of the Lord"), they ask what conditions are required to enter the holy place, to "see the face of God" (cf. Ps 42,2; Deut 31,11) and thus to live in a deep communion with the divinity. Then the answer comes: more important than rites or outward practices are "clean hands," in other words acting according to God's commands. And even this is not enough, for the acts a person accomplishes must come from a "pure heart," a heart that places God at the centre and that seeks him in all things.

This does not mean living a life without mistakes, or striving after an impossible perfection by acts of will-power. The person with a pure heart is someone who does not wish to walk along two roads at the same time but who knows that he will find happiness in God alone. Searching for God as the only thing that matters and avoiding behaviour that betrays a divided soul (Jas 1,8), such a person receives from God the gift of greater life (blessing), the fruit of a relationship of communion (justice).

- What does this expression mean for me: "to walk along just one road, not two at the same time?"
- What aspects of our society make it difficult to try and live for God alone? How can I express, concretely, that God is the centre of my life?



## Listening to the continents

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### Bosnia / Croatia

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#### A meaning to life through helping people

The last issue of the Letter from Taizé, of October-November, presented part of an account by Anna of Sarejevo given while she was in Taizé last summer. What follows is the rest of her testimony. Her words remain inscribed in the hearts of those who heard her speak:

"At the beginning of the war, I was a student of electrical engineering and computer sciences in Sarajevo. Together with my family, I lived close to the airport. The area quickly became more and more dangerous and soon we had to leave it and move into the city-center where my grandparents were living. My parents are still living there now. When the war began, I was extremely frightened. I had lost my home, and then the chance to study. I had no idea what to do. I needed to find something to occupy myself, something which would give a meaning to my life. Because of the danger, we spent most of our time underground, in the basement; for three months, I nearly never came up. My grandparents and parents all of a sudden found themselves living in desperate conditions and couldn't accept what was happening. At the beginning I found meaning to my life in helping them to survive and continue within this impossible situation. I went out to get water and wood in order to prepare our meals. Then I helped our neighbors, who were old and sickly, at times helping them to climb down into the basement whenever it was necessary. My life had been turned upside-down. I

could no longer study, but every day I had something to do. I found meaning to my life by helping people.

I discovered that, in such situations, God is very close to us. And I wanted to share with others the strength which God gave to me. That is how I came to meet up again with my friends. They too were looking for some meaning in all the events. All that we had before had vanished, our studies and our work. Moreover, we could no longer move around in the city. For three months' time we couldn't see one another; we were all hiding out underground! It was impossible also to phone for the telephone system was no longer working. We had need of God. When we were able to meet for mass, we were so happy to be alive and together. It was an intense moment when we could once again sing together. We understood that material things were not so important and that we could be happy because we were together and alive, and because God accompanied us.

We were imprisoned in the city and couldn't move. We depended entirely on a few persons who were outside and who helped us. Several of our friends had left the city but continued helping us. One of them, by the name of Jozo, was in a village in a free zone and kept in touch with us. Many other young people, even if they couldn't send any aid, tried to communicate with us and encourage us, so that we would know they were thinking of us. From all around, people came bringing food, medicine and other necessities. It was a beautiful experience of sharing. These people couldn't understand how we could be happy while living in the middle of such circumstances. It's true that at the beginning we were always a bit angry when we heard them say, "Oh, it's so beautiful here!" We wanted to be anywhere else, as long as it was not Sarajevo. But then we began to understand the immense gift God was giving us, the gift of his presence among us, which many discovered and sensed during the difficult moments.

I had kept hoping to be able to continue my studies but it had become impossible. My university section was located in the destroyed sector. Finally I received permission to leave the city and, after waiting for one year, I was able to go along with one of the food convoys as they left Sarajevo. At present, I am in Zagreb where I hope to be able to begin studying soon. I am always in contact with my friends in Sarajevo and I try to help them. In Taizé, I have made many new friendships. Young people from all over the world will be writing them letters and sending messages. I will make sure the messages reach Sarajevo so that my friends receive them, because I know how important it is for them to know they are not alone, and that they have friends who are thinking of them and praying. I hope that they will receive the strength they need to hold on."

## Sharing the life of refugees

A young German tells about her stay in Croatia and in Bosnia:

"The war has been going on now for nearly three years. Like many other people, I have often asked myself what I could do to help in the face of so much suffering. Recently I had the opportunity to travel there with an aid organization in order to deliver supplies and to work in a refugee camp with children.

The refugees had been settled in a hotel on an island across the water from the city of Split. It seems that since three years they had had no contact whatsoever with people from outside. The first relationships we could create were with the children who were delighted to see the toys we had brought with us. Afterwards the parents started inviting us to their rooms. Though they had almost nothing themselves, they insisted on offering us something, some coffee and "refugee cake" which is made without an oven. More than lack of comfort, it is their isolation and uncertainty about the future which make them suffer most. Thanks to the children, we were able to build some bridges between different groups of refugees. A number of the activities we started while we were there have continued after we left. But the most beautiful reward were the words of an elderly woman who told us: 'You gave us the assurance that we are not forgotten. There are often supply convoys that come bringing material aid, but no one had yet come to share our life.'

During my last week there, I drove a supply vehicle in Bosnia and crossed through this devastated country. I hadn't expected to see such destruction. How will the people be able to survive the winter when, for safety sake, they must live below ground? The only joy I saw was that of an older couple with whom I could talk and share news about their daughter and granddaughter born in the refugee camp."

## Lithuania

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#### Old people and lonely children

The youth of St George's parish in Kedainiai, Lithuania, write:

Taizé showed us very simple ways for reconciliation and for discovering the meaning of our lives: joining in prayers, taking part in discussions, sharing our experience with others. We understood that a common life between people and nations is not something that is built by force; it implies the giving of ourselves.

During the first meetings after our return to Lithuania we discussed ways of exchanging experiences with other par-

steps and try to begin. A little spark can start a great fire!

## Brazil

### Human dignity above all else

Xavier, who works full-time with a development organization, writes after a second visit to Brazil:

"Several years ago I spent a long period of time in Brazil, and now I was able to return for several weeks together with a team of people. The team is looking for possible partner organizations among farmers involved in new agrarian reforms. The potentials are great, and it is not always a development project thought up in France that will best serve the needs here! Many of the farmers are of such high calibre, and I wonder, how can we live up to their level? How to free ourselves from being the "all-knowing expert" who runs the risk of stifling a thousand and one local initiatives? Often the most capable people are the ones who take up responsibility. And yet how to insure that they remain close to those at the grassroots level and that they accompany them? Sometimes it is the least courageous who continue working, or else people like myself who come from afar and who are unsure about how to put the ideas they were taught into practice.

More and more, I see that development is a series of transformations which we did not at first think ourselves capable of. An "old" French farmer who had plenty of experience back home came along with us. It was incredible: the number of potential little traps and empty progress that he could uncover in our work as supposed experts. Must one have lived already a lot in order to know how to put the human person and respect for human dignity above all else?"

## Japan

### The longing for an invisible presence

The pilgrimage of trust in Japan is not something visible in terms of meetings of many thousands of young people. It is nevertheless a reality that is very much alive and full of meaning. Whenever they can, young Japanese set off to take part in meetings prepared by Taizé, be it in India, in Munich last year, or shortly in Paris.

During a retreat held in the Tokyo area last June, young Japanese were able to share their different experiences. All of them said that suddenly they no longer

felt alone in their search for new ways of expressing their faith in a society where success and competition are at a premium.

The retreat started in the small Anglican parish of Ikebukuro. The small meeting-place helped the atmosphere by its very simplicity. Very quickly a real sense of communion was established. The Japanese were joined by others from Indonesia, Iran, USA, England, Germany and France. Three times a day, everyone gathered in the little church for prayer. Brother Roger's Letter, From One Beginning to Another, was used as a basis for the reflection.

On Saturday afternoon, in small groups everyone set off to make visits in the neighbourhood. Some went to Sanyo where different groups and communities offer hospitality to beggars and people with no home. Another group went to meet the priests and pastors of the various churches, another to the hospitals and still others to a neighbourhood where Koreans are living in unimaginable conditions. Later everyone met up for a prayer in a church in the centre of town.

Living the pilgrimage of trust in Japan means essentially to listen to young people. "Searching for meaning" are words that come up all the time. Visits, times of silence, repetitive singing help young Japanese to "discern the miracle of a presence."

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## Listening to the continents

ishes, what we could undertake with old people and children during our meetings.

After our pilgrimage to Taizé we decided to visit the remote parishes of Kedainiai district to share our impressions with the youth there.

We remembered our first visit to the orphanage "Saulute" on Christmas Eve last year. Every child told his secret wish and they wanted their wishes to come true before the rebirth of baby Jesus. We could hardly hold back our tears, because every child wanted his own daddy and mummy, his own brothers and sisters. They wanted to love and to be loved. Since that evening we decided to take care of these poor children. Every Sunday we took them to the church and prayed together. At those moments they seemed to forget their loneliness and their hearts were filled with love and joy. We understood that we were bound by invisible links, very strong ones which couldn't be broken or torn. It might be compared with a candle light which spreads out and can hardly be extinguished.

The youth of St George parish are very frequent guests at an old persons' home in Apytalaukis which is not far from Kedainiai. Old age is the most difficult period in a person's life especially when they are abandoned or suffer from some mental disease. A kind smile and warm words are like sunbeams in their everyday life. We are always welcome there. When we sing or talk, or are in prayer together, the faces of the old people shine with happiness and gratitude. At first sight it can seem meaningless, but rubbing shoulders in such a way is a source of inspiration for both sides: for the old people it is like some additional support in their difficult and lonely life. For us it is the way to share the light of faith which was lit or re-lit in our hearts in Taizé. Perhaps it is not much to be spoken about, but everyone should start with small